

The Empire's Ideology: Imperialism and "Anti-Imperialism of the Fools"

By [Prof. James Petras](#)

Global Research, January 02, 2012

2 January 2012

Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

One of the great paradoxes of history are the claims of imperialist politicians to be engaged in a great humanitarian crusade, a historic "civilizing mission" designed to liberate nations and peoples, while practicing the most barbaric conquests, destructive wars and large scale bloodletting of conquered people in historical memory.

In the modern capitalist era, the ideologies of imperialist rulers vary over time, from the early appeals to "the right" to wealth, power, colonies and grandeur to later claims of a 'civilizing mission'. More recently imperial rulers have propagated, many diverse justifications adapted to specific contexts, adversaries, circumstances and audiences.

This essay will concentrate on analyzing contemporary US imperial ideological arguments for legitimizing wars and sanctions to sustain dominance.

Contextualizing Imperial Ideology

Imperialist propaganda varies according to whether it is directed against a competitor for global power, or whether as a justification for applying sanctions, or engaging in open warfare against a local or regional socio-political adversary.

With regard to established imperial (Europe) or rising world economic competitors (China), US imperial propaganda varies over time. Early in the 19th century , Washington proclaimed the "Monroe Doctrine", denouncing European efforts to colonize Latin America , privileging its own imperial designs in that region. In the 20th century when the US imperial policymakers were displacing Europe from prime resource based colonies in the Middle East and Africa , it played on several themes. It condemned 'colonial forms of domination' and promoted 'neo-colonial' transitions that ended European monopolies and facilitated US multi-national corporate penetration. This was clearly evident during and after World War 2, in the Middle East petrol-countries.

During the 1950s as the US assumed imperial primacy and radical anti-colonial nationalism came to the fore, Washington forged alliances with the declining colonial power to combat a common enemy and to prop up post-colonial powers to combat a common enemy . Even with the post World War 2 economic recovery, growth and unification of Europe, it still works in tandem and under US leadership in militarily repressing nationalist insurgencies and regimes. When conflicts and competition occur, between US and European regimes, banks and enterprises, the mass media of each region publish "investigatory findings" highlighting the frauds and malfeasance of its competitors ..and US regulatory agencies levy heavy fines on their European counterparts, overlooking similar practices by Wall Street financial firms.

In recent times the rising tide of militarist imperialism and colonial wars fueled by Israeli proxies in the US state has led to some serious divergencies between US and European imperialism. With the exception of England, Europe made a minimum symbolic commitment to the US wars and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Germany and France concentrated on expanding their export markets and economic capacities; displacing the US in major markets and resource sites. The convergence of US and European empires led to the integration of financial institutions and the subsequent common crises and collapse but without any coordinated policy of recovery. US ideologists propagated the idea of a “declining and decaying European Union”, while the European ideologues emphasized the failures of Anglo-American de-regulated, ‘free markets’ and Wall Street swindles.

Imperial Ideology, Rising Economic Powers and Nationalist Challengers

There is a long history of imperialist “anti-imperialism”, officially sponsored condemnation, exposés and moral indignation directed exclusively against rival imperialists, emerging powers or simply competitors, who in some cases are simply following in the footsteps of the established imperial powers.

English imperialists in their heyday justified their world-wide plunder of three continents by perpetuating the “Black Legend”, of Spanish empire’s “exceptional cruelty” toward indigenous people of Latin America, while engaging in the biggest and most lucrative African slave trade. While the Spanish colonists enslaved the indigenous people, the Anglo-American settlers exterminated them.....

In the run-up to World War II, European and US imperial powers, while exploiting their Asian colonies condemned Japanese imperial powers’ invasion and colonization of China. Japan, in turn claimed it was leading Asia’s forces fighting against Western imperialism and projected a post-colonial “co-prosperity” sphere of equal Asian partners.

The imperialist use of “anti-imperialist” moral rhetoric was designed to weaken rivals and was directed to several audiences. In fact, at no point did the anti-imperialist rhetoric serve to “liberate” any of the colonized people. In almost all cases the victorious imperial power only substituted one form colonial or neo-colonial rule for another.

The “anti-imperialism” of the imperialists is directed at the nationalist movements of the colonized countries and at their domestic public. British imperialists fomented uprisings among the agro-mining elites in Latin America promising “free trade” against Spanish mercantilist rule; they backed the “self-determination” of the slaveholding cotton plantation owners in the US South against the Union; they supported the territorial claims of the Iroquois tribal leaders against the US anti-colonial revolutionaries ... exploiting legitimate grievances for imperial ends. During World War II, the Japanese imperialists supported a sector of the nationalist anti-colonial movement in India against the British Empire. The US condemned Spanish colonial rule in Cuba and the Philippines and went to war to “liberate” the oppressed peoples from tyranny....and remained to impose a reign of terror, exploitation and colonial rule...

The imperial powers sought to divide the anti-colonial movements and create future “client rulers” when and if they succeeded. The use of anti-imperialist rhetoric was designed to attract two sets of groups. A conservative group with common political and economic interests with the imperial power, which shared their hostility to revolutionary nationalists

and which sought to accrue greater advantage by tying their fortunes to a rising imperial power. A radical sector of the movement tactically allied itself with the rising imperial power, with the idea of using the imperial power to secure resources (arms, propaganda, vehicles and financial aid) and, once securing power, to discard them. More often than not, in this game of mutual manipulation between empire and nationalists, the former won out ... as is the case then and now.

The imperialist “anti-imperialist” rhetoric was equally directed at the domestic public, especially in countries like the US which prized its 18th anti-colonial heritage. The purpose was to broaden the base of empire building beyond the hard line empire loyalists, militarists and corporate beneficiaries. Their appeal sought to include liberals, humanitarians, progressive intellectuals, religious and secular moralists and other “opinion-makers” who had a certain cachet with the larger public, the ones who would have to pay with their lives and tax money for the inter-imperial and colonial wars.

The official spokespeople of empire publicize real and fabricated atrocities of their imperial rivals, and highlight the plight of the colonized victims. The corporate elite and the hardline militarists demand military action to protect property, or to seize strategic resources; the humanitarians and progressives denounce the “crimes against humanity” and echo the calls “to do something concrete” to save the victims from genocide. Sectors of the Left join the chorus and, finding a sector of victims who fit in with their abstract ideology, plead for the imperial powers to “arm the people to liberate themselves” (sic). By lending moral support and a veneer of respectability to the imperial war, by swallowing the propaganda of “war to save victims” the progressives become the prototype of the “anti-imperialism of the fools”. Having secured broad public support on the bases of “anti-imperialism”, the imperialist powers feel free to sacrifice citizens’ lives and the public treasury, to pursue war, fueled by the moral fervor of a righteous cause. As the butchery drags on and the casualties mount, and the public wearies of war and its cost, progressive and leftist enthusiasm turns to silence or worse, moral hypocrisy with claims that “the nature of the war changed” or “that this isn’t the kind of war that we had in mind ...”. As if the war makers ever intended to consult the progressives and left on how and why they should engage in imperial wars!

In the contemporary period the imperial “anti-imperialist wars” and aggression have been greatly aided and abetted by well-funded “grass roots” so-called “non-governmental organizations” which act to mobilize popular movements which can “invite” imperial aggression.

Over the past four decades US imperialism has fomented at least two dozen “grass roots” movements which have destroyed democratic governments, or decimated collectivist welfare states or provoked major damage to the economy of targeted countries.

In Chile throughout 1972-73 under the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende, the CIA financed and provided major support - via the AFL-CIO-to private truck owners to paralyze the flow of goods and services .They also funded a strike by a sector of the copper workers union (at the El Tenient mine) to undermine copper production and exports, in the lead up to the coup. After the military took power several “grass roots” Christian Democratic union officials participated in the purge of elected leftist union activists. Needless to say in short order the truck owners and copper workers ended the strike, dropped their demands and subsequently lost all bargaining rights!

In the 1980’s the CIA via Vatican channels transferred millions of dollars to sustain the

“Solidarity Union” in Poland, making a hero of the Gdansk shipyards worker-leader Lech Walesa, who spearheaded the general strike to topple the Communist regime. With the overthrow of Communism so also went guaranteed employment, social security and trade union militancy: the neo-liberal regimes reduced the workforce at Gdansk by fifty percent and eventually closed it, giving the boot to the entire workforce.. Walesa retired with a magnificent Presidential pension, while his former workmates walked the streets and the new “independent” Polish rulers provided NATO with military bases and mercenaries for imperial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq .

In 2002 the White House, the CIA, the AFL-CIO and NGOs, backed a Venezuelan military-business - trade union bureaucrat led “grass roots” coup that overthrew democratically elected President Chavez. In 48 hours a million strong authentic grass roots mobilization of the urban poor backed by constitutionalist military forces defeated the US backed dictators and restored Chavez to power .Subsequently oil executives directed a lockout backed by several US financed NGOs. They were defeated by the workers’ takeover of the oil industry. The unsuccessful coup and lockout cost the Venezuelan economy billions of dollars in lost income and caused a double digit decline in GNP.

The US backed “grass roots” armed jihadists to liberated “Bosnia” and armed the “grass roots” terrorist Kosova Liberation Army to break-up Yugoslavia. Almost the entire Western Left cheered as, the US bombed Belgrade , degraded the economy and claimed it was “responding to genocide”. Kosova “free and independent” became a huge market for white slavers, housed the biggest US military base in Europe, with the highest per-capita out migration of any country in Europe .

The imperial “grass roots” strategy combines humanitarian, democratic and anti-imperialist rhetoric and paid and trained local NGO’s, with mass media blitzes to mobilize Western public opinion and especially “prestigious leftist moral critics” behind their power grabs.

The Consequence of Imperial Promoted “Anti-Imperialist” Movements: Who Wins and Who Loses?

The historic record of imperialist promoted “anti-imperialist” and “pro-democracy” “grass roots movements” is uniformly negative. Let us briefly summarize the results. In Chile ‘grass roots’ truck owners strike led to the brutal military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and nearly two decades of torture, murder, jailing and forced exile of hundreds of thousands, the imposition of brutal “free market policies” and subordination to US imperial policies. In summary the US multi-national copper corporations and the Chilean oligarchy were the big winners and the mass of the working class and urban and rural poor the biggest losers. The US backed “grass roots uprisings” in Eastern Europe against Soviet domination, exchanged Russian for US domination; subordination to NATO instead of the Warsaw Pact; the massive transfer of national public enterprises, banks and media to Western multi-nationals. Privatization of national enterprises led to unprecedented levels of double-digit unemployment, skyrocketing rents and the growth of pensioner poverty.The crises induced the flight of millions of the most educated and skilled workers and the elimination of free public health, higher education and worker vacation resorts.

Throughout the now capitalist Eastern Europe and USSR highly organized criminal gangs developed large scale prostitution and drug rings; foreign and local gangster ‘entrepreneurs’ seized lucrative public enterprises and formed a new class of super-rich oligarchs Electoral party politicians, local business people and professionals linked to Western ‘partners’ were

the socio-economic winners. Pensioners, workers, collective farmers, the unemployed youth were the big losers along with the formerly subsidized cultural artists. Military bases in Eastern Europe became the empire's first line of military attack of Russia and the target of any counter-attack.

If we measure the consequences of the shift in imperial power, it is clear that the Eastern Europe countries have become even more subservient under the US and the EU than under Russia . Western induced financial crises have devastated their economies; Eastern European troops have served in more imperial wars under NATO than under Soviet rule; the cultural media are under Western commercial control. Most of all, the degree of imperial control over all economic sectors far exceeds anything that existed under the Soviets. The Eastern European 'grass roots' movement succeeded in deepening and extending the US Empire; the advocates of peace, social justice , national independence, a cultural renaissance and social welfare with democracy were the big losers.

Western liberals, progressives and leftists who fell in love with imperialist promoted "anti-imperialism" are also big losers. Their support for the NATO attack on Yugoslavia led to the break-up of a multi-national state and the creation of huge NATO military bases and a white slavers paradise in Kosova. Their blind support for the imperial promoted "liberation" of Eastern Europe devastated the welfare state, eliminating the pressure on Western regimes' need to compete in providing welfare provisions. The main beneficiaries of Western imperial advances via 'grass roots' uprisings were the multi-national corporations, the Pentagon and the rightwing free market neo-liberals.As the entire political spectrum moved to the right a sector of the left and progressives eventually jumped on the bandwagon. The Left moralists lost credibility and support, their peace movements dwindled, and their "moral critiques" lost resonance. The left and progressives who tail-ended the imperial backed "grass roots movements", whether in the name of "anti-Stalinism", "pro-democracy" or "anti-imperialism" have never engaged in any critical reflection; no effort to analyze the long-term negative consequences of their positions in terms of the losses in social welfare, national independence or personal dignity.

The long history of imperialist manipulation of "anti-imperialist" narratives has found virulent expression in the present day. The New Cold War launched by Obama against China and Russia, the hot war brewing in the Gulf over Iran's alleged military threat, the interventionist threat against Venezuela's "drug-networks", and Syria's "bloodbath" are part and parcel of the use and abuse of "anti-imperialism" to prop up a declining empire. Hopefully, the progressive and leftist writers and scribes will learn from the ideological pitfalls of the past and resist the temptation to access the mass media by providing a 'progressive cover' to imperial dubbed "rebels". It is time to distinguish between genuine anti-imperialism and pro-democracy movements and those promoted by Washington, NATO and the mass media.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Prof. James Petras](#), Global Research, 2012

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **Prof. James**
Petras

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca